
Interior Rivers
Resource Conservation & Development
Area Plan

September 26, 1997

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AREA PLAN SUMMARY

The Interior Rivers Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) area encompasses 35,000 square miles and 14 villages in southwestern Alaska. Listed alphabetically, the 14 villages are: Aniak, Anvik, Chuathbaluk, Crooked Creek, Grayling, Holy Cross, Lime Village, Lower Kalskag, Red Devil, Russian Mission, Shageluk, Sleetmute, Stony River and Upper Kalskag.

This RC&D Area Plan has been formulated to address problems and realize opportunities that are common to all or most of the region's 14 villages, and therefore have significant implications for the Interior Rivers region as a whole. The Interior Rivers RC&D Council has established the following vision, mission and goals to guide its activities in helping to address the needs of the 14 villages that it serves.

VISION

The Interior Rivers RC&D area is at 20th century standards (no Third World conditions) with local control that guides strong economic development while protecting the environment, subsistence resources and the cultural heritage of all people.

MISSION

The mission of the Interior Rivers RC&D Council is to create long-term jobs and improve village living standards on behalf of all residents of the region.

GOALS

- Goal 1: The RC&D Council is known for effective administration of projects that improve village living standards region-wide.
- Goal 2: The RC&D Council is known for supporting local control through coordination and cooperation to achieve common goals.
- Goal 3: The Interior Rivers RC&D region is improved through better transportation infrastructure, health facilities, housing, water/sewer/landfill and other utilities and services.
- Goal 4: New investments and businesses will strengthen the region's economy, resulting in more local job opportunities and lower costs of living.
- Goal 5: Effective education, training and outreach programs are being addressed on key issues that affect the region's residents.

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The RC&D Area Plan is presented in seven sections:

Section 1 summarizes the organizational background of the Interior Rivers RC&D Council, the purposes of the Area Plan, the planning process that has been used in its development, and the basic planning elements that are addressed.

Section 2 describes physical, demographic and social characteristics of the Interior Rivers region.

Section 3 summarizes problems and opportunities that are common to villages within the region.

Section 4 presents the Interior Rivers RC&D Council vision statement.

Section 5 presents the Interior Rivers RC&D Council mission statement.

Section 6 lists goals and objectives established by the Interior Rivers RC&D Council.

Section 7 presents required agreements between the RC&D Council and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service.

MAP PAGE

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Organizational Background. In September 1993, application was submitted to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to establish a Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Program for the Middle Kuskokwim and Yukon areas of southwestern Alaska (see map). The application was approved in February 1994. An RC&D Council was established and consists of representatives from the 14 villages in the region, the Kuspuk School District, Kuskokwim Native Association, Tanana Chiefs Conference, The Kuskokwim Corporation, and Calista. Between 1994 and September 1996, two different coordinators were assigned to Aniak, Alaska by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to assist the RC&D Council with initial efforts. From October 1996 to present, technical assistance has been provided by the NRCS and an Interim Coordinator to assist the RC&D Council to complete needed training, data collection and planning activities to move forward with the Area Plan. Established as a private nonprofit charitable organization under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, the Interior Rivers RC&D Council, Inc. is responsible to carry forward the activities addressed in this Area Plan.

B. Purpose of the Plan. The Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Program is based on the premise that local people, working together, can identify and solve problems and realize opportunities that will enhance the quality of life in their area. Towards that end, the three primary purposes of this Area Plan are to:

- (1) establish the basis and direction for resource conservation, utilization and development activities undertaken by the Interior Rivers RC&D Council,
- (2) provide a management tool to assist in managing the Council's business and help attract volunteers and funding to accomplish its goals and objectives, and
- (3) fulfill statutory requirements for receiving assistance through the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service RC&D Program.

By concurring in the Area Plan, the State Conservationist agrees to provide assistance (within RC&D program resources) to the Council to implement projects and activities consistent with the goals and objectives outlined in this Plan.

C. Planning Process. This Area Plan has been developed through a multi-year, participative public planning process involving local residents and community leaders throughout the RC&D Area. The process has been guided by planning principles and guidelines addressed in Part 522, RC&D Area Planning, NRC&DM, Third Ed., June 1993 and the NRCS *National Planning Procedures Handbook*, Revision 1, December 1995. The Council's planning process has further benefited from information and assistance provided by: (1) community and economic profiles for the villages of Grayling, Anvik, Shageluk and Holy Cross prepared by the Department of Resources Management, School of Agriculture and Land Resources Management, Agriculture and Forestry Experiment Station, University of Alaska-Fairbanks (contract report: USDA/Cooperative State Research Service); (2) economic profiles for villages in the Middle Kuskokwim region prepared by Kuskokwim Planning and Management Corporation; and (3) the Alaska Department of Community and Regional Affairs, Municipal and Regional Assistance Division, which provided valuable historic, geophysical and village information for the Middle Kuskokwim and Yukon region and also facilitated 1994 community planning meetings in Aniak and Chuathbaluk.

The following are basic steps that have been undertaken in the development of the Interior Rivers RC&D Area Plan:

1. February 1994 - August 1996. Community planning meetings to identify village problems and needs were held in Aniak and Chuathbaluk, facilitated by staff from the Alaska Department of Community and Regional Affairs, Municipal and Regional Assistance Division (Feb-June 1994). Regional visioning conference was held in Aniak (March 1995). Arrangements were made at the conference for village planning meetings to identify problems and needs with 9 of 14 held between March-May 1995. Village needs lists (9 of 14) were reviewed and updated in August 1996.

2. With assistance from the Council's Interim Coordinator, work plan was developed to conduct public meetings on village needs in the remaining five villages--Stony River, Crooked Creek, Sleetmute, Lime Village and Russian Mission (January 1997). The work plan was subsequently amended to provide for a combination of on-site planning meetings, mail survey and telephone follow-up to develop or update village needs lists for all communities in the RC&D area (April 1997).
3. RC&D Council meeting was held in Aniak on April 11, 1997. New officers were elected and an executive committee was established. Plans were made to hold a two-day RC&D Council planning meeting in late May.
4. Survey instrument was developed and mailed/faxed to each City Council or tribal Traditional Council requesting that they review/update at their next council meeting the Village Needs Lists developed in previous planning sessions or, if no list had previously been developed, to submit a list of the village's highest priority economic and resource development needs (April 28, 1997).
5. On-site community planning sessions were held in May 1997 in Crooked Creek (May 12), Chuathbaluk (May 12), Aniak (May 13) and Russian Mission (May 14), led by the RC&D Council Interim Coordinator and planning assistant. Summary reports were written for each planning session, including a list of key village needs as identified by the local residents who participated in the public meetings.
6. Previous reports and documents inventorying resources in the Interior Rivers region were collected and reviewed, and each Council member was mailed a set of all Village Needs lists in preparation for the RC&D Council's planning session. The Council planning session was held in Aniak May 29-30, 1997 at the Aniak Traditional Council Community Hall. Sessions were open to the public. The District Conservationist and community planning specialist with the Alaska Department of Community and Regional Affairs, Municipal and Regional Assistance Division, also attended some portion or all of the sessions. The sessions were facilitated by the planning assistant working with the RC&D Council and its Interim Coordinator. A variety of planning techniques (large and small group discussions, break-out sessions, carousel planning,

etc.) were used by the Council to review and assess planning data, identify key opportunities, constraints, issues and problems common to villages in the Interior Rivers RC&D area, develop vision and mission statements, and establish goals and objectives for the RC&D Area Plan.

7. All planning materials were consolidated into a draft RC&D Area Plan (July 1997). On August 1, 1997, the Interim Coordinator distributed the draft to the RC&D Council and the District Conservationist for review and comment.

8. At its meeting in Aniak on August 15, 1997, the RC&D Council made final revisions to the draft and developed an annual Plan of Work for implementing the RC&D Area Plan, based on a formulation and evaluation of alternative actions and determination of the most appropriate course of action to accomplish its established goals and objectives.

9. The final RC&D Area Plan adopted by the RC&D Council and approved by the Natural Resource Conservation Service state conservationist has been distributed to all sponsors and to other interested organizations as determined by the Interior Rivers RC&D Council. Results of activities under the plan will be periodically evaluated. Adjustments and refinements will be made, as needed, as the planning and implementation process evolves.

D. Planning Elements. The Interior Rivers RC&D Area Plan addresses three basic planning elements:

1. Economic Development Planning Element. There is strong commitment throughout the Interior Rivers region to increase local employment opportunities and economic self-sufficiency in order to reduce reliance on public assistance dollars. This challenge takes on added significance as state and federal government proceed over the next five years to implement major welfare reforms. A more diverse private sector economy and effective education and training programs will be needed to help meet this challenge.

Economic development activities need to be sensitive and responsive to some basic guidelines. The most important is recognition that the Native cultural and economic values that are predominant in the Interior Rivers region are intimately tied to the natural environment and subsistence pursuits. Care and respect for the region's natural resources are critical to all

development activity. *The RC&D Area Plan envisions the development of a solid economic base that will provide a healthy mix of subsistence and income-producing components.*

Business and economic development opportunities for the Interior Rivers region focus primarily on small business (retail, service-oriented, cottage industry) and on prudent utilization and development of natural resources. Many of these development efforts will require combinations of private and public resources and cooperative, coordinated efforts. Likewise, meaningful local participation in regional planning and implementation efforts will be required. At present there is no single regional foundation from which to promote and help coordinate activities needed for basic business development. As described in Section II.I-J. of this Area Plan, villagers in the Interior Rivers region are served by a complex set of municipal and tribal governments and Native for-profit and non-profit corporations. Each is dedicated to select community development, social services and/or economic investment activities on behalf of different segments of the population. To maximize development opportunities in the region, coordinated communications and planning are needed. *The RC&D Area Plan envisions Council activities that promote local control and effective coordination and cooperation among diverse organizations to strengthen economic development, education and training initiatives in the region.*

2. Community Development Planning Element. Because there is no Borough (county equivalent) to help the villages coordinate response to community development needs that they share in common, each village must deal on its own with a myriad of state and federal agencies as well as private sector organizations and firms. This creates numerous problems. Each village is small and so individual residents carry a tremendous burden in trying to research, carry out and follow up on necessary actions. The repetition of this process in each village leads to duplicated effort and wasted time, energy and resources that the villages can ill-afford. Again, because each village is small, no one village has the clout that all would have together to advocate for timely and effective response to their common community development needs.

Working together, the villages of the Interior Rivers region have the opportunity to substantially advance their most critical community development needs--bringing more resources into the region, making more effective use of the resources that are available, and promoting better and

more efficient service from government agencies. Villages in the region fall far short of meeting twentieth century daily living standards. All share the need to develop adequate water and waste disposal systems, improve the quantity and quality of their housing, address landfill and hazardous waste disposal problems, carry out essential improvements to local roads and airfields, develop new or improved fuel storage capacity to increase safety and help reduce costs, and provide essential infrastructure to meet health, recreational and fire protection needs. *The RC&D Area Plan envisions Council activities that promote local control and effective coordination and cooperation at the regional level to help meet these critical community development needs.*

3. Environmental Planning Element. The riverine communities of the Interior Rivers region have identified common needs to address a number of environmental issues. These include flood mitigation, erosion control and the improvement of water quality and supply. Loss of land and homes to flooding, riverbank and road erosion, and poor water quality are problems that further add to the challenges already confronting the region's villages. Again, capacity to effectively address these issues is weakened by lack of a single regional foundation and coordinating body to assist the villages to pull and act together to meet common needs.

Capacity to better address problems and maximize opportunities related to the economic development, community development and environmental needs of the Interior Rivers region hinges in large part on the establishment and effective administration of a strong, coordinating body with region-wide representation and focus. Towards that end and consistent with the input and priorities of the 14 villages whose interests it represents, the Interior Rivers RC&D Council has developed a vision statement, mission statement, goals and initial objectives to guide its activities. These are presented in later sections of this Area Plan.

II. DESCRIPTION OF THE PLANNING AREA

This section summarizes information on the physical, demographic, social and land use characteristics of the Interior Rivers RC&D area. Information presented in this section has been drawn from two primary sources: (1) *Economic Profile of the Middle Kuskokwim Region*, which includes the communities of Aniak, Chuathbaluk, Crooked Creek, Lime Village, Lower Kalskag, Red Devil, Russian Mission, Sleetmute, Stony River and Upper Kalskag, and (2) *Community and Economic Profile for the Villages of Grayling, Anvik, Shageluk and Holy Cross*.

A. Natural Setting. The Interior Rivers region (see map at front) refers to the portion of the Kuskokwim River drainage system that stretches east to west from Lime Village on the Stony River to Lower Kalskag, approximately 203 miles downriver, and includes the villages of Grayling, Anvik, Holy Cross and Russian Mission lying along the banks of the Yukon River as well as Shageluk on the Innoko River due east of the Yukon.

The Interior Rivers region encompasses approximately 35,000 square miles. Along the Kuskokwim River, stands of black spruce, birch and poplar are interspersed with scrub growth, muskeg or bog. Rolling hills characterize the region's interior terrain. Along the Yukon and Innoko Rivers, white spruce, paper birch and quaking aspen are the principal trees on the better drained soils and south-facing slopes. Balsam poplar is dominant within the active floodplains, together with thick stands of willow and alder brush. The poorly drained cold soils on the north-facing slopes and those with permafrost near the surface are thinly forested with stunted black spruce and tundra vegetation of sedges, mosses and low growing shrubs. The region's river and stream bottomlands are characterized by immense, marshy flatlands that provide prime habitat for waterfowl and shorebirds.

The region supports a wide variety of large and small mammals ranging from moose, caribou and bear to furbearers, hare and rodents. Anadromous fish, including five salmon species, eel, boreal smelt and the arctic cisco are the region's most important fishery resource. Freshwater fish in rivers, streams, lakes and ponds commonly include northern pike, blackfish, stickleback, burbot and five species of whitefish.

B. Climate. Stretching over a vast expanse, the region's climate varies from maritime to continental. Temperatures fluctuate from lows of -60°F in the winter to over 90°F in the summer. Snowfall ranges from 60-110 inches. Average precipitation ranges from 16-22 inches. High winds are not uncommon, sometimes exceeding 85-95 miles per hour.

C. Historical Overview. It is estimated that Native people of the Interior Rivers region have inhabited the area for at least 500 generations. Riverine communities were generally established in protected areas during the winter. These varied in size from small family settlements (ten or less people) to villages (100-300 people). Family groups traveled to various fish camps in the summer, salmon and other fish being their primary sustenance. Spring and fall camps were also established to harvest migratory waterfowl, caribou, moose, berries and other subsistence resources. Land ownership and use were collective and cooperative. Trade with other locales was an important part of the economy. Family structure was key to economic, political and spiritual aspects of social organization. Social order was basically egalitarian and nonauthoritarian.

Western contact in the region dates from 1832 when the first Russian interior post was established on the Kuskokwim River, followed the next year by the founding of Fort St. Michael on the Yukon River. Over the next decade, lower reaches of the Kuskokwim and Yukon Rivers were traced and several posts were established. Much of the interior Native population was not directly contacted until the late nineteenth and early twentieth century when religious organizations established missions and schools along the Kuskokwim and lower Yukon.

For the past hundred years, expanding contact with non-Native populations has led to the development of mixed subsistence-cash economies and to a complex set of traditional and introduced social and political institutions. However, the region's Yup'ik Eskimo and Athabascan Indian traditions and values have shown considerable persistence and resilience. Today, there is strong commitment to a subsistence lifestyle, traditional leadership, and customary laws. For social, cultural and economic reasons, most residents of the region continue a subsistence-oriented way of life that they actively seek to preserve.

D. Demographics. The 1990 U.S. Census established a total population in the Interior Rivers region of 2,410 residents. More than two-thirds (71%) resided in the nine

villages in the Middle Kuskokwim area; less than one-third (29%) resided in the five villages on and around the Yukon. Aniak was the largest of the villages with a 1990 population of 540; Lime Village was the smallest with a 1990 population of 42 residents.

The chart on the following page summarizes population changes in the Interior Rivers region since 1990. Overall, the region has grown by 8.4% compared to a growth rate of 10.5% for Alaska as a whole. However, rates of population growth and decline vary dramatically from village to village. Three villages have grown as much as 22% to 28%. Three other villages either had no growth or modest population declines.

INTERIOR RIVERS REGION 1990-1996 POPULATION			
Area Name	1990 Population	1996 Population	% Change 1990-96
Aniak	540	595	10.2%
Anvik	82	91	10.9%
Chuathbaluk	97	123	26.8%
Crooked Creek	106	136	28.3%
Grayling	208	203	(2.5%)
Holy Cross	277	281	1.4%
Lime Village	42	44	4.8%
Lower Kalskag	291	302	3.8%
Red Devil	53	65	22.6%
Russian Mission	246	284	15.4%
Shageluk	139	139	No change
Sleetmute	106	109	2.8%
Stony River	51	43	(15.7%)
Upper Kalskag	172	197	14.5%
Interior Rivers Region	2,410	2,612	8.4%
State of Alaska	550,043	607,800	10.5%
Source: Population of Boroughs/Census Areas and Places, 1990-1996, Alaska Department of Labor, Research and Analysis Division			

The people of the Interior Rivers region are primarily Yup'ik Eskimo and Athabascan Indian (Ingalik and Holikachuk). Based on the 1990 Census, over 85% of all residents are Alaska Native; 14% are white; and 1% are black or other racial origin. Approximately half of the region's non-Native population lives in Aniak. Red Devil is the only village with an equivalent

distribution of Natives and non-Natives. In most villages, 90-98% of the residents are Alaska Native.

The region's population is 53% male, 47% female. Median age in 1990 was 25.4 years. Over 40% of the region's population was less than 18 years old and 14% of total population was less than five years old.

E. Employment and Income. As in the past, the regional economy today is based primarily on subsistence, supplemented in a majority of households ($\pm 70\%$) by income from public assistance programs. Wage and salary employment opportunities are scarce. Most jobs are seasonal or part-time only. As a result, villages in the Interior Rivers region have among the lowest per capita incomes in the state. Average annual monthly wage is about three-fourths of the statewide average. More than three-quarters of the region's households are in the low-moderate income category.

Government is the region's single largest employer, accounting for half or more of all salaried jobs. These jobs are primarily associated with village schools (teachers, administrators, support staff) or local government. Some state and federal employment is also available in some villages. Native for-profit and non-profit organizations provide other important employment opportunities. Examples are village health aide jobs provided through Yukon-Kuskokwim Health Corporation. Service sector employment includes local retail businesses and private utilities or cooperatives. Construction, firefighting, commercial fishing, guiding and trapping are important sources of seasonal wage employment; however, the work is limited and sporadic.

F. Housing. Housing provision is a major challenge in the Interior Rivers region because of the extremely high cost of transporting construction materials and the limited availability of conventional financing. As a result, most new housing in the region in recent years has been built through government-subsidized programs. According to the 1990 U.S. Census, there were 2.9 rooms on average in each housing unit (Middle Kuskokwim communities only); median housing value was \$44,200, ranging from lows of \$15,000 in Lime Village and Stony River to a high of \$81,900 in Russian Mission. For the Interior Rivers region as a whole, average household size averaged 3.4 persons, compared to averages of 2.9 persons for Alaska

and 2.7 persons for the United States. Due to the high cost and limited availability of housing, multigenerational family living arrangements are common.

G. Utility Services. Throughout the region, utility services are extremely limited and costs are high. Potable water is generally supplied from individual wells or from a community well located at a central watering point. Water is usually hauled by hand. Central water storage buildings sometimes provide showers and washing facilities for village use. Pit privies and honey buckets are the most common means of wastewater disposal; in general, only the village school or clinic has septic tank facilities. Only three of ten villages in the Middle Kuskokwim area have provision for some piped water and centralized sewer facilities.

Electric service, supplied by diesel-powered generators, is available in all villages except Lime Village. Service is provided by three different utility providers. All three participate in the Power Cost Equalization (PCE) program, which provides state-subsidized rate relief to rural Alaskans to help offset high energy costs.

All fuel for the region is delivered by barge or by air, when supplies run out between the seasonal barge runs. Prices are generally at least twice the rate of comparable fuels in urban areas. This is due primarily to small delivery volume, village inaccessibility, distance and isolation from fuel supplies, and storage requirements.

Communications services include telephone, provided by two separate utilities through a satellite communications system. Television service is available throughout the region through the ARCS Public Broadcasting system. Some villages have good radio reception, if groundwires and external antennas are used.

H. Health Care. Health care in the region is provided primarily through the services of the Yukon-Kuskokwim Health Corporation (YKHC), a regional tribal health care corporation. YKHC staffs a sub-regional clinic in Aniak, and administers health clinics in each village, staffed by local residents trained as health aides to provide primary acute care. Nearest hospital services are at the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta Regional Hospital in Bethel (99 airmiles from Aniak). The hospital provides some elective and emergency surgery and other health care services, including dental and mental health services.

I. Government Structure. The Interior Rivers region has a complex local governing structure. One part of the structure is formulated under constitutional provisions of the State of Alaska; the other is formulated in accordance with federally-recognized tribal governing bodies.

Municipal government. Alaska's constitution authorizes two forms of municipal government, boroughs and cities. Boroughs are area-wide local governments, generally comparable to county government in other states. Areas that are not within the boundaries of an organized borough are part of the Unorganized Borough. *The Interior Rivers region is part of the Unorganized Borough of Alaska. Services in the region are mainly provided by state government. Services that would otherwise be the responsibility of a borough government are funded by state agencies, or through city councils, or under contract to tribal traditional councils or non-profit organizations.*

Within the Unorganized Borough, communities may incorporate as home rule cities, first-class cities, second-class cities, or remain unincorporated (no municipal powers). *In the Interior Rivers region, 9 of 14 villages have incorporated as second-class cities with an elected city council; the other 5 villages are unincorporated and therefore do not have city council governments.*

Tribal government. All 14 villages in the Interior Rivers region have traditional councils, recognized by the federal government as official tribal governing bodies and, as such, eligible to administer a number of federal programs and exercise self-governing powers on behalf of the Native population. In unincorporated communities, traditional councils are often the entity through which state and federal programs are administered.

J. Native Corporations. Under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971 (ANCSA), real property and monetary conveyances were made to village and regional profit corporations established under the legislation. Today, two ANCSA regional corporations and seven ANCSA village corporations serve various of the 14 villages in the Interior Rivers region. The ANCSA corporations and villages that they serve are:

Regional Corporations:

- Calista Corporation - Aniak, Chuathbaluk, Crooked Creek, Lime Village, Lower Kalskag, Red Devil, Russian Mission, Sleetmute, Stony River, Upper Kalskag
- Doyon, Ltd. - Anvik, Grayling, Holy Cross, Shageluk

Village Corporations:

- Deloycheet, Inc. - Holy Cross
- Hee-Yea-Lingde Corporation - Grayling
- Ingalik, Inc. - Anvik
- Lime Village Company - Lime Village
- Russian Mission Native Corporation - Russian Mission
- The Kuskokwim Corporation - Aniak, Chuathbaluk, Crooked Creek, Lower Kalskag, Red Devil, Sleetmute, Stony River, Upper Kalskag
- Zho-Tse, Inc. - Shageluk

There are also several other regional Native non-profit corporations (not already addressed in earlier sections of this narrative) that provide a mix of housing, health, social services and other programs on behalf of various villages within the Interior Rivers region. These include:

- Association of Village Council Presidents (AVCP)
- Kuskokwim Native Association (KNA)
- Tanana Chiefs Conference (TCC)

K. Transportation. The Interior Rivers region, spanning approximately 35,000 square miles, has no transportation connections to the rest of Alaska except by water or air. There is no railroad into the area. There are no roads of any kind to connect the villages to other communities or to each other, with the exception of the link between Upper Kalskag and Lower Kalskag. A trail network connects some villages. For the entire region, there are only a few miles of local roads, all unpaved. These provide limited connections within any one village to its school, airfield, sewage lagoon or landfill.

Rivers are the region's primary transportation arterials. The rivers are traversed by barges and skiffs during the summer. In winter, their frozen surfaces become "ice roads" for dog teams, snowmobiles and other motorized vehicles. The larger rivers also provide a landing surface for float or ski planes, except during seasonal transitions. Because of the high cost of air freight, most villages receive their food, fuel, building materials and other goods by freight barges. Depending on weather conditions, barge service is available from late May to late September or early October.

Villages in the Interior Rivers region rely heavily on air transportation for travel within as well as to and from the region. All villages have airfield facilities, although only a few have lighting and only one (Aniak) is equipped for instrument approach. Except for Lime Village, all villages in the Interior Rivers region have year-round scheduled flight service, weather permitting. In the fall and winter, high winds and poor visibility can delay flights for several days. Mail and some supplies are delivered to the villages by air. Passenger airfares and freight rates are very high.

L. Land Ownership. As is the case with local government structures, patterns of land ownership and management in the Interior Rivers region are complex. They divide into several basic categories:

BIA Native Allotment Lands. The 1906 Alaska Native Allotment Act, subject to later amendments, authorized the Secretary of the Interior, acting through the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), to return up to 160 acres of vacant land to resident Natives, provided that continued use and occupancy could be proved. Within the Interior Rivers region, native allotment lands are managed by Association of Village Council Presidents, Kuskokwim Native Association, and Tanana Chiefs Conference through their BIA realty programs.

BLM Townsite Lands. The 1926 Alaska Native Townsite Act (repealed in 1976) provided means for Alaska Natives to obtain title to certain lands in the public domain. Administrative authority rested with the Secretary of the Interior, acting through the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). As a matter of practice, subdivided lots within townsites were generally deeded to Natives and non-Natives alike. Today, townsites are administered either by city

governments in incorporated villages, by the traditional council in unincorporated villages, or by the regional non-profit corporations (for restricted lots).

ANCSA Lands. Ownership and management of the surface estate of lands conveyed under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act resides with village corporations (of which there are seven in the Interior Rivers region). Ownership and management of the sub-surface estate of lands conveyed under ANCSA reside with the regional corporations (of which there are two in the Interior Rivers region).

Other provisions of ANCSA address alternative means for municipalities and individuals to acquire lands in villages. Under Section 14(c) of ANCSA, village corporations are required to deed to local residents, businesses and non-profit organizations the surface estate of those village lands they occupied as of December 18, 1971. Provision is also made to convey from the remaining surface estate a negotiated number of acres to incorporated municipalities or, in the case of unincorporated villages, to the State in trust for any future municipalities.

Federal and State Land. There are extensive federal- and state-administered landholdings throughout the Interior Rivers region. These include the Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge, west of the Aniak River, numerous parcels of state patented land and land selected by the State of Alaska but not yet patented.

Other Private Land. In addition to the Native allotment, townsite and ANCSA landholdings already described, there are numerous other private landholdings throughout the region that are held either by individuals or by private organizations and corporations.

M. Land and Resource Use. Except for very small-scale development that has occurred in and immediately around the 14 village townsites, the Interior Rivers region comprises a vast expanse--35,000 square miles in size--of undeveloped lands.

There has been or presently is some extraction of gold, cinnabar, silver and gravel. Agriculture projects have succeeded in producing a variety of vegetable crops for local consumption; some commercial berry projects have been pursued. The region includes extensive timber and gravel resources, specifically along the river valleys and in the eastern portion of the resource area.

Timber is harvested for lumber, houselogs, fuel wood and local craftwork. There is one commercial sawmill located near Chuathbaluk.

Fisheries are an important resource--harvested for subsistence living, through commercial fishing permits and in conjunction with a limited number of sportsfishery activities. But because of variations from year-to-year in catches and prices, the fisheries cannot always be relied on to provide a steady, predictable income source for individual households or for the region as a whole.

III. DESCRIPTION OF PROBLEMS AND OPPORTUNITIES

This section describes problems and opportunities facing the 14 villages in the Interior Rivers RC&D area. The information presented here has been gathered from a series of Village Needs Surveys and public meetings over the past three years, and updated most recently in May 1997 (see Section I.C. of this Plan for a description of the planning process).

Village needs summaries for each community in the Interior Rivers region are presented in the Appendix of this Area Plan. At its planning session in late May 1997, the Interior Rivers RC&D Council reviewed and discussed this information in order to determine needs, problems and opportunities that are common to all or most villages in the RC&D area, and therefore have significant implications for the Interior Rivers region as a whole. Results of the Council's deliberations are summarized below.

Regional Need/Problem: Communication and cooperation among organizations serving the region. Effective communication and cooperation among federal, state and local agencies and organizations that provide services to the region is lacking, resulting in poor delivery of services to local residents in areas such as job training, health care and infrastructure improvement projects.

The problem stems from several inter-related causes. As described in Section II of this Area Plan, villagers in the Interior Rivers region are served by a complex set of municipal and tribal governments and Native for-profit and non-profit corporations. Each is dedicated to select community development, social services and/or economic investment activities on behalf of different segments of the population. Because there is no Borough (county equivalent) to help the villages coordinate responses to needs that they share in common, each village must deal on its own with a myriad of state and federal agencies as well as private sector organizations and firms. Since each village is small, individual residents carry a tremendous burden in trying to research, carry out and follow up on necessary actions. The repetition of this process in each village leads to duplicated effort and wasted time, energy and resources that the villages can ill-afford. Again, because each village is small, no one village has the clout that all would have together to promote and help coordinate activities to address common needs.

Opportunities. The opportunity exists for the RC&D Council to serve as a single regional foundation from which to help coordinate the region-wide communications and planning needed for timely and effective response to problems common to all or most villages in the Interior Rivers area. This requires that the Council first establish a sound administrative basis for its operations as well as effective, on-going channels of communication. This will help build on and reinforce local residents' recognition of the value of working together to improve services and living standards, maximize the use of existing resources, and help leverage more resources and funding for local projects.

Regional Need/Problem: Jobs and training programs. As described in Section II of this Area Plan, a severe shortage of full-time, year-round jobs and local training opportunities has led to a high rate of unemployment and a high rate of dependence on public assistance. To meet this challenge, a more diverse private sector economy and effective education and training programs are needed. Effective response takes on added significance as state and federal government proceed over the next five years to implement major welfare reforms.

Opportunities. As an initial step toward strengthening the region's economy, the opportunity exists for the RC&D Council to apply for designation as an Alaska Regional Development Organization (ARDOR). There is currently no ARDOR serving the Interior Rivers region. ARDOR designation would open up opportunities for assistance from the Alaska Department of Community and Regional Affairs to carry out economic development activities and obtain resources from other state agencies. For lack of an ARDOR, or any other regional organization focused on economic development, the region is not able to take full advantage of all the resources available for the development of local jobs and a stronger, more diverse economy.

Immediate opportunities also exist to: (1) assist the Interior Rivers Arts & Crafts Cooperative to apply for non-profit status. This would help strengthen the Cooperative's operational viability and its capacity to effectively expand potential markets for local arts and crafts that are produced in the region; and (2) help coordinate with other

organizations to expand students' access to career fair workshop/training opportunities being sponsored by the Kuskokwim Educational Foundation.

Other opportunities may also exist for the Council to help facilitate welfare-to-work opportunities in the region, increase the number and rate of participation in job apprenticeship programs, and help promote establishment of a regional-serving technical training center. Additional background information is needed before the Council can determine how and in what areas it can lend the most effective assistance.

Regional Need/Problem: Recreation opportunities for children and teens. As described in Section II of this Area Plan, over 40% of the region's population is less than 18 years old. There is a serious lack of recreational opportunities, including cultural activities, after-school and summer educational programs and sports to help the region's youth to develop skills and experience that lead to healthy and productive lives.

Opportunities. In addition to career fair training opportunities for youth that are addressed above, the opportunity exists to help promote other programs specifically targeted to serve young people in the region. One immediate opportunity may be to expand 4-H activities in the villages, benefited by the RC&D office in Aniak which allows for a stronger presence for USDA programs throughout the region.

Other regional needs and problems are recognized to exist and may be addressed by the RC&D Council once its initial objectives and activities have been successfully completed. These include:

- Need for transportation improvements, including roads and airfield runways. The Interior Rivers region has no transportation connections to the rest of Alaska except by water or air. There is no railroad into the area. There are no roads of any kind to connect the villages to other communities or to each other, with the exception of the link between Upper Kalskag and Lower Kalskag. Villages rely heavily on air transportation for travel within as well as to and from the region.

Progressive improvement of local roads and airfields is a common need throughout the region.

- Need for water and sewage disposal improvements. Communities throughout the region lack adequate water/sewer systems, creating unsanitary conditions that lead to health hazards.
- Need for health clinic improvements. Some villages lack water and sewer connections that allow for sanitary conditions to be maintained. Some also lack adequate space and privacy measures to allow for confidentiality in providing health care.
- Need for new housing and rehabilitation of existing housing. Much of the local housing is overcrowded, in poor repair and prohibitively expensive to heat in the winter.
- Need for landfill improvements, including hazardous waste disposal. Many communities lack safe and adequate landfills, and the improper disposal of both household and industrial waste creates the potential for environmental and health hazards.
- Need for new or improved fuel storage capacity. A lack of adequate bulk fuel storage creates both environmental hazards (from poorly maintained tank farms) and high fuel costs (from shortages caused by the lack of storage capacity).
- Need for erosion control. Throughout the region, erosion is causing damage to roads, cemeteries and other valuable community sites and infrastructure.
- Need for improved fire protection. Many villages lack adequate facilities and equipment for fire protection, leading to large and expensive losses in the event of fires.

The Interior Rivers RC&D Area Plan envisions the development over time of a solid economic base that will provide a healthy mix of subsistence and income-producing components and position the region's residents to be as self-sufficient as possible in addressing many of these needs. Continued efforts will be made to identify and maximize opportunities to utilize the region's vast natural resources. For example, the region is rich in fish and game that provide for substantial subsistence activities, as well as create a small tourism industry for sport fishing and hunting. The region's timber and mineral resources are also adequate to provide small-scale opportunities for commercial development. Timber and gravel can be used to meet local needs, and there is potential for development of a gold mine near Crooked Creek.

Capacity to better address problems and maximize opportunities related to the needs of the Interior Rivers region hinges in large part on the establishment and effective administration of a strong, coordinating body with region-wide representation and focus. Towards that end and consistent with the input and priorities of the 14 villages whose interests it represents, the Interior Rivers RC&D Council has developed a vision statement, mission statement, goals and initial objectives to guide its activities. These are presented in the following sections of this Area Plan.

IV. VISION STATEMENT

The Interior Rivers RC&D area is at 20th century standards (no Third World conditions)
with local control that guides strong economic development
while protecting the environment, subsistence resources and the cultural heritage of all people.

V. MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Interior Rivers RC&D Council is
to create long-term jobs and improve village living standards
on behalf of all residents of the region.

VI. GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Typical of the region it represents, the Interior Rivers RC&D Council faces the challenge of having very limited resources. Basic organizational capacity-building needs must be met before the Council will be well-positioned to effectively carry out its region-wide business agenda. The initial objectives established in this Area Plan reflect a reasonable and realistic approach, focusing on efforts to successfully meet the Council's capacity-building needs, while moving forward with other Council activities that can be accomplished within the limited resources currently in hand.

Goal 1: The RC&D Council is known for effective administration of projects that improve village living standards region-wide.

Objective 1.1. Establish a sound administrative basis for on-going Council operations.

Goal 2: The RC&D Council is known for supporting local control through coordination and cooperation to achieve common goals.

Objective 2.1. Each RC&D Council member will share information quarterly about Council activities with other organizations that they are a part of (Traditional Council, Village Council, etc.)

Objective 2.2. Publish at least one article each quarter about Council activities in local newspapers, organization newsletters, etc.

Goal 3: The Interior Rivers RC&D region is improved through better transportation infrastructure, health facilities, housing, water/sewer/landfill and other utilities and services.

Objective 3.1. Set up and implement a process by which the RC&D Council communicates information and support to others about priority needs in the villages or in the region as a whole, starting now at the local level.

Goal 4: New investments and businesses have strengthened the region's economy, resulting in more local job opportunities and lower costs of living.

Objective 4.1. Obtain ARDOR designation by or before summer 1998.

Objective 4.2. Support business development and/or expansion as opportunities arise.

Goal 5: Effective education, training and outreach programs are being addressed on key issues that affect the region's residents.

Objective 5.1. Help find funding and coordinate with other organizations to bring workshop/training opportunities to the region.

Objective 5.2. Coordinate with federal and state agencies to identify welfare-to-work opportunities for the region.

Objective 5.3. Work with unions to establish apprenticeship programs in villages in the region.

Objective 5.4. Promote establishment of a regional technical training center.

VII. AGREEMENTS

(1) The Interior Rivers RC&D Council agrees that the RC&D program will be conducted in compliance with the nondiscrimination provisions as contained in Title VI and VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 as amended, the Civil Rights Restoration Act of 1987 (Pub. Law 100-259) and other nondiscrimination statutes; namely, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, the Age Discrimination Act of 1975 and in accordance with the regulations of the Secretary of Agriculture (7CFR-15, Subparts A & B) which provide that no person in the United States shall, on the ground of race, color, national origin, age, sex, religion, marital status, or handicap/disability be excluded from participation in, or be denied the benefits of, or be otherwise subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial (or technical) assistance from the Department of Agriculture or any Agency thereof.

(2) The Interior Rivers RC&D Council agrees that the signing of this document constitutes agreement to comply with federal laws concerning restrictions on lobbying, a drug-free workplace, and responsibilities for nonprocurement, suspension, and disbarment, and state review.

(3) The Interior Rivers RC&D Council hereby adopts this RC&D Area Plan and agrees to effectively use the assistance provided by the United States Department of Agriculture to realize the goals and objectives outlined herein.

Interior Rivers RC&D Council, Alaska

By: _____ Date: _____

Carl Morgan, Council President

Attest: _____

Robert Walker, Council Secretary

This action authorized at an official meeting of the
Interior Rivers RC&D Council on _____, 1997

U.S. Department of Agriculture - Natural Resource Conservation Service

Approved By: _____ Date: _____

Charles Bell

State Conservationist

APPENDIX

Interior Rivers RC&D Area - Village Needs Lists

Aniak

Village Needs List

Listing is an update as of May, 1997 of February 1994 Needs Assessment.

List reflects items that have not been addressed yet, or on which more work is needed

A. Community Development Needs

1. Inter-village road between Aniak & Chuathbaluk
2. Inter-village railroad
3. Pipeline from the Yukon
4. Bridge across the slough
5. Park near high school
6. City police
7. Public transportation (bus)
8. Adopt an Elder program
9. Dust control
10. 7-11 store
11. Carr's store
12. Jobs (continuing need)
13. Community involvement in State Fair (continuing need)
14. Recreation (movie theater or adult center)
15. Open gym during summer
16. Road maintenance; reflectors on roads
17. Hazardous waste disposal (site has been identified)
18. Improve & expand public library programs (continuing need)
19. Teen center improvements (fix bathroom; new games)—in process

B. Economic Development Needs

1. Daycare heating system
2. Seasonal meat & fish processing
3. Hunting & fishing guide services and tourism
4. Grant writing—continuing need
5. Encourage small businesses; community revolving loan fund-- concern that AVCP funding for business development may not be reaching the Mid-K area
6. Second hand store
7. Mall
8. Bank (ATM machine helps)
9. Auto repair/mechanic
10. Bakery
11. Hotel
12. Liquor store/bar

13. Bowling alley
14. Jobs
15. Stores of all types

C. Education Needs

1. New books—on-going need but is being addressed
2. Athletic building-swimming pool
3. Fine arts-some music instruction available—nothing in dance, art
4. Celebration of college students (and high school students)
5. Raise competencies in all subjects—working on it
6. Fully staffed and equipped vocational education center
7. Set standards—was noted that AOTE is working on this also
8. Parental involvement & parent-teacher cooperation--on-going need--is improving
9. Improve students' public speaking skills—trend is improving
10. Improve self esteem
11. Integration of “life skills”, “problem solving”, and “real life” learning situations
12. Learn about capitalism
13. Learn about self-sufficiency
14. “Community Service” requirement in curriculum
15. Students work with local government (are participating in Close Up)
16. Hire Native teachers—perception is that demand is greater than supply

D. Health & Social Service Needs

1. Big Brothers and Big Sisters Program
2. Helicopter pad
3. Funeral services and grieving facilitation
4. Adopt an Elder
5. Dentist—situation is improving but more services are needed
6. Dust control (will be better when airport, roads are paved)
7. Foster homes—always a need
8. Self esteem

E. Cultural Identity Needs

1. Native cultural center—museum
2. Cultural pride/self esteem
3. Yup'ik language program (needs more community/family involvement;)
4. Community Native dance group
5. Arts and crafts program (also has economic development implications)

F. Local Government Needs

1. Cooperation between City and ATC (and other governing units)
2. Curfew ordinance—needs to be enforced
3. Public involvement in City and Aniak Traditional Councils
4. Road maintenance—dust control is badly needed

5. Repair fire department; another emergency vehicle; new equipment
6. Student involvement—Opportunity for more Dragonslayers (youth volunteer firefighters)
7. Restrict motorized vehicles on dike—public safety hazard + does damage to dike
8. Licenses + safety classes for motorized vehicles— 4-wheelers and snow machines

G. New Identified Needs (items that were added to the list by participants at the May 13, 1997 meeting)

1. Further strengthening of the Arts & Crafts Cooperative
2. Supported Housing-- for Elders and persons with disabilities
3. Concern for water supply and water quality—need water treatment provisions
4. Need for protection of all subsistence resources
5. Need for regular, on-going feedback to community on progress of planning efforts & projects
 - There is an information vacuum—participants noted that they generally felt better, more positive when they had a chance to review actions that have been completed or moved forward since 1994. Need to publicize activities in ways that reach the largest number of community residents (examples, Aniak Paper; Tundra Drums; KNA quarterly newsletter; school newsletters or handouts)
 - Community needs opportunities to assess whether things are on track and moving in the right direction. Also need opportunities to make input on any changes in priorities.

Anvik

Village Needs List

(Capital Improvement Projects Priority Listing as of May 29, 1997)

1. Erosion control/Road improvements
2. Maintenance shop for heavy equipment
3. Fire protection
4. Harbor/port
5. Bridge
6. City building improvements

Chuathbaluk

Village Needs List

(Listing as of May, 1997)

1. Additional water source(s)--is only one for village
2. Sewage lagoon--need rock walkway and fencing
3. Pipe/pump system to homes (like in Bethel)
4. More full-time, part-time and seasonal jobs
5. Additional education and training so people can qualify for jobs
6. Resolution of land ownership issues-finalize 14(c)(3) selections
7. Construction capital for new business(es)--example, cross-country ski lodge
8. Renovation and rehab of housing--including weatherization, energy efficiency improvements
9. Fencing at the landfill
10. Road to link HUD housing and school
11. Road to Aniak
12. Expand and reorient runway--crosswinds are a safety hazard

Issue Areas/Needs of Priority Concern

- Water/Sewer
- Jobs
- Housing
- Roads
- Airfield Improvements

Crooked Creek

Village Needs List

(Listing as of May, 1997)

1. New clinic facility
2. Quality water supply--for school and washeteria
3. Adequate provisions for sewage disposal--sewage lagoon is not in operation
4. Measures to address drugs and alcohol
5. Water pipeline system to make use of good sources of water
6. State and federal agencies to communicate with villagers on water/wastewater issues
7. Better access to the landfill-road is impassable; no turnaround
8. Access to grader to maintain roads
9. Road (to goldmine) that would also open up access to berrypicking and firewood areas
10. More housing
11. Rehabilitation of existing housing-winterization, weatherization
12. More jobs (including youth and young adults)
13. Skills training and work-ready preparation
14. Multi-purpose community facility (to replace existing Post Office/office building)
15. Start and complete 14(c)(3) process
16. Air traffic control around village--air hazards because of volume traffic at goldmine

Issue Areas/Needs of Priority Concern

- Jobs
- Water/Wastewater
- Housing
- Roads
- Health Care

Grayling

Village Needs List

(Priority Listing as of May 1, 1997)

1. New dump truck
2. VPSO
3. New housing
4. Drainage system
5. New bridge
6. Road improvement to berrypicking site
7. New community hall

Holy Cross

Village Needs List

(Priority Listing as of August 7, 1996)

1. Fix existing roads
2. Culverts
3. Erosion-roads and ditches
4. Dust Control
5. Dump upgraded and road to dump
6. Additional roads-roadway up the hill
7. Road signs
8. Drainage-for runoff
9. Graveyard extension

Lime Village

Village Needs List

No list on file as of May, 1997

Lower Kalskag

Village Needs List

(Priority Listing as of September 18, 1997)

1. Fire Protection/Public Safety
2. Teen Center
3. Erosion Control on Cemetery
4. Equipment for roads (earth moving, dust control, and for ice road)
5. Housing Program
6. Sewer system for village - connection to lagoon
7. Bike Trail/Clean Up
8. Cap Old Landfill
9. Layout of Roads and Survey

Issue Areas/Needs of Priority Concern

- Economic Development
- Jobs/Training

Red Devil

Village Needs List

(Priority Listing as of August 7, 1996)

1. Need landfill-hard to get consensus; town has land but lacks control because not 2nd class city
2. Water has heavy metals and fluorocarbon
3. Private land (?)
4. Need technical help to clean up spill
5. Need gas station

Russian Mission

Village Needs List

(Listing as of May, 1997)

1. Ability to make better use of facilities in Aniak such as the sub-regional clinic (convenience, cheaper)
2. Address the loss of cultural identity and low self-esteem of youth in the village
3. Address fishing concerns
 - Earlier notice from state of opening of commercial roe fishery
 - Not allowed to use fish wheels
 - Need a market for Y3 fish--Y1 fishery getting very crowded
4. Need sawmill and shop equipment
5. Recruiting and education about military opportunities for youth
6. Help young people get various work licenses (heavy equipment, commercial drivers license, etc)
7. Capacity for home canning
8. Revamp HUD housing program to allow houses to be built locally using local materials
9. Need for better housing design (log construction; work area/storage area; safety concerns)
10. More housing for younger generations
11. Permanent trail markers between villages
12. Improvements to local roads (culverts, drainage)
13. More fish camp locations
14. Revamp hunting regulations (to address safety issues and lessen pressure on subsistence resources)
15. Build prison in the region--more rehabilitative
16. Recreation areas for kids within village (playground, baseball field, teen center)
17. Designated dog yard

Issue Areas/Needs of Priority Concern

- Economic Development/
Jobs/ Training
- Subsistence Resources
- Health Care
- Housing

Shageluk

Village Needs List

(Priority Listing as of August 7, 1996)

1. Solid waste management-possible geologic inventory; upgrade fencing
2. Upgrade road - erosion occurring from river (EWP?)
3. Tank farm-need to dike up, pipe fittings
4. Sewer and water-only one common well
5. Flood water-it's affecting lagoon
6. Need sawmill-grant for new mill
7. Gravel-locate other sites; future need of road to pit
8. Ditch and drainage-fill washes out roads
9. Inventory sewer and water for individuals
10. Housing-lack of housing and materials
11. Runway-need new site as runway is too far from town

Sleetmute

Village Needs List

No list on file as of May, 1997

Stony River Village Needs List

(Priority Listing as of May, 1997)

1. Job development (timber cutting and sawmill; tourism; gas sales; crafts; market for furs from trapping)
2. Road improvements--need grader and compactor
 - DOT has grader and cat for airstrip, but can't be used for roads
 - Widen road so cars can pass
3. Airstrip improvements (no drainage - need culverts; clear brush that is growing too close)
4. Dock for barge (barge ties up to bank and causes erosion)
5. Health clinic improvements
 - Clinic is very small and there's no privacy
 - No running water or plumbing
 - Arctic Mission owns adjoining land and won't allow cats on land to install septic

Other Identified Problems and Needs

- Three (3) HUD houses are vacant because people can't afford them
- Teen center and computers - recreation (pool table); coffee shop; crafts
- Plumbing (sewer line)
- Fuel/gas (revolving fund in community; Calista's bulk fuel fund)
- Running water
- Jobs - SYETP (run by AVCP) disqualifies some kids because of parents' income

Upper Kalskag Village Needs List

(Priority Listing as of August 7, 1996)

1. Sewer system for village-connection to new lagoon
2. Erosion control on cemetery-tied in Calista Corp.
3. Access to landfill-enlarge landfill and need road
4. Cap old landfill

5. Fire protection
6. Public safety building
7. Clinic building is needed
8. Road to Aniak
9. Enlarge runway for bigger planes
10. Need help in layout of roads and surveys
11. Equipment for roads-earth moving and for ice road
12. Housing program for new construction